

# OBSERVATIONS ON THE SAMSON FLOOR AT MOPSUESTIA

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*Dedicated to Hugo Buchthal*

THE floors discovered in 1955 by Ludwig Budde and the late Helmuth Bossert at Misis, the ancient Mopsuestia, and excavated in the ensuing years are among the most important mosaic finds of recent decades. While of great interest to the student of ornament and composition, iconography, and figure style in pavements of the early Byzantine period, they also concern the epigrapher, the Old Testament scholar, and the historian of Judaism and Christianity. Their art historical significance, too, extends well beyond the sphere of the mosaic specialist, as I hope to show. The Misis find in fact dramatizes in an unusual way the wider ramifications of the study of ancient floor decorations.

Budde's book appeared in 1969.<sup>1</sup> Preceded by a number of preliminary articles,<sup>2</sup> it must be taken to be his final account of the Misis mosaics; and I ought to say at once that it constitutes the sole basis of the comments which follow. I have, alas, no firsthand knowledge of the site. The purpose of my paper is to focus attention on certain aspects of the mosaics and to initiate discussion of some of the problems which Budde's publication raises. It is only a first step. A number of questions that are open at present presumably could be cleared up through inspection of the site; others probably could not, judging by what Budde has to say about the fate of parts of the complex since its discovery.<sup>3</sup> So far as the amazing cycle of scenes from the life of Samson is concerned, to which this paper will be specifically devoted, it was in very fragmentary condition when it was found and has since been in part reburied.<sup>4</sup>

Before I turn to the Samson mosaic, I shall discuss briefly the site as a whole and the building in which the mosaic was found. Mopsuestia is situated in the Cilician plain south of the Taurus mountains and east of Adana.<sup>5</sup> It is a place famous in the annals of Byzantine ecclesiastical history as the see of Bishop Theodore, a leader of the theological school of Antioch in the early fifth century whose writings subsequently became a subject of fierce controversy.<sup>6</sup> The building to which our mosaics belong was situated outside the city proper and has been interpreted by Budde as a martyrium church, though

<sup>1</sup> L. Budde, *Antike Mosaiken in Kilikien*, I (Recklinghausen, 1969); hereafter quoted as "Budde." I have published a review of the book, and its companion volume issued in 1972, in *Art Bulletin*, 55 (1973), 140 ff.

<sup>2</sup> L. Budde, "Die rettende Arche Noes," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, 32 (1956), 41 ff.; *idem*, "Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken von Misis-Mopsuestia in Kilikien," *Pantheon*, 18 (1960), 116 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Budde, 16 f., 102 f.

<sup>4</sup> Budde, 18.

<sup>5</sup> See W. Ruge, in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, 16 (1935), col. 243 ff.

<sup>6</sup> See P.-Th. Camelot, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Herder), 10 (Freiburg, 1965), col. 42 ff., (with bibliography).

at one time there seems to have been a suggestion that it may have been a synagogue.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the plan published by Budde (our fig. A)<sup>8</sup> does not cover the building in its entirety. It shows the greater part of the nave and aisles but omits the narthex to the west (in which mosaics were also found)<sup>9</sup> and—more importantly—the semicircular apse to the east described in Budde's text.<sup>10</sup> It is clear, however, from the data at hand that this was a basilica which was, even by eastern Mediterranean standards, rather short in relation to its width. Budde stresses the dearth of architectural elements found (much of the building material evidently had been removed systematically) but states that there was a single aisle on either side of the nave and that the nave was separated from the two aisles by colonnades.<sup>11</sup> It would appear from the plan, however, that to the north, at any rate, there were *two* aisles. The existence of two entirely separate mosaic bands, each about 3.5 m. wide, would seem to indicate this. I do not recall any example of a single aisle whose decoration is thus divided along the longitudinal axis. It should be noted also that between the two bands there is an empty space corresponding in width to those between the aisles and the nave, so that there is room here for another colonnade. On the south side, though, there is evidence only of a single mosaic band. The absence of any indication of the walls on this side is particularly regrettable. Normally, of course, one would assume a second aisle also to the south to counterbalance the outer aisle to the north. On the other hand, certain asymmetries in the mosaics, to be mentioned shortly, may be cited in support of the assumption that the layout of the building was indeed lopsided and weighted toward the north.

Whether or not a second aisle existed to the south, the plan of the building must be considered somewhat abnormal for an Early Christian basilica; and it should be noted that with its unusual relation between length and width it bears a resemblance to that of certain synagogues discovered in recent years. In particular, mention should be made of the synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias, which, in its earlier state, was a building roughly square in overall shape with two aisles to the left of the nave and one to the right;<sup>12</sup> and of another synagogue discovered a few years ago at Gaza which had two aisles on either side of the nave.<sup>13</sup> Both buildings were richly decorated with mosaic floors. In the

<sup>7</sup> The suggestion seems to have been made when the mosaic with Noah's ark was first uncovered (cf. Budde, in *RACr*, 32, p. 42). The fact that a bronze cross was found lying on the mosaic floor (in the vicinity of some intrusive tombs) does not suffice to disprove it (for this cross, see Budde, fig. 8 and p. 34). See also *infra*.

<sup>8</sup> Budde, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Budde, 55 and fig. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Budde, 31. The only other plan of the building which I am aware of is one published by Th. H. Bossert in *Türk Arkeoloji Dergisi*, 7 (1957), pl. 28, 1. It shows the narthex and—less distinctly—the apse. It does not conclusively answer the question—to be mentioned presently—as to how far the building extended to the south.

<sup>11</sup> Budde, 31.

<sup>12</sup> See the plans published by M. Dothan in *Qadmoniot*, 1 (1968), 120 and 121 (text in Hebrew). Cf. *idem*, in *Israel Exploration Journal*, 12 (1962), 153f.; S. J. Saller, *A Revised Catalogue of the Ancient Synagogues of the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1969), 26f. (with further references).

<sup>13</sup> A. Ovadia, in *IEJ*, 19 (1969), p. 194, fig. 1. Cf. Saller, *op. cit.*, 26 (with further references).

light of these analogies, the possibility that the Misis basilica was a synagogue rather than a church should be examined closely.<sup>14</sup>

For the present the problem must be left unsolved, relevant though it obviously is to a full understanding of the mosaics which were found in the building. In the nave was a splendid and highly ornate carpet containing at the west end a representation—already well known—of Noah's ark.<sup>15</sup> The floors of the adjoining aisles were covered with decorative mosaics only, while the Samson cycle occupied the outer north aisle (fig. 2). If there was a corresponding outer aisle also to the south, one would naturally assume that its decoration consisted of another picture cycle to form a pendant to the Samson story. On the other hand, the layout of the mosaics as a whole was not entirely symmetrical, as I have already indicated. While the ornament in the northern of the two aisles adjoining the nave was purely abstract—it consisted of a series of squares containing a variety of geometric motifs<sup>16</sup>—the floor of the southern one was covered with oblong panels which showed, within geometric frames, elongated friezes with trees, plants, and birds. Oddly enough, these representational motifs were not, as one would expect, oriented to be viewed from the nave, i.e. from the north, but rather from the south (fig. 1).<sup>17</sup> In other words, the decoration as a whole seems to have been laid out not only to greet a visitor entering the nave from the narthex in the west—this is the view for which the panel with Noah's ark was designed—but also a person entering from the south. The latter's gaze would be drawn northward across the nave and the inner north aisle to the Samson sequence, which provided a major visual goal. Given the existence of this secondary south-north axis in the orientation of the mosaics, it is indeed possible that there never was a second aisle to the south.

For the moment these uncertainties concerning both layout and function of the building must be left in abeyance. I must leave unresolved also the question of the date of the mosaics which, aside from some obvious later repairs, clearly formed a unified whole. On the basis of the preliminary publi-

<sup>14</sup> The fact that the building was oriented almost due east, rather than toward Jerusalem, could be claimed to militate against this assumption. The question requires further study. The location of the building outside the city walls is not incompatible with its having been a synagogue. Professor M. Avi-Yonah, whom I consulted on this point at the Vienne Colloquium, reminded me that the synagogue at Beth She'an lies outside the walls. Cf. Saller, *op. cit.*, 19f. (with further references).

<sup>15</sup> Budde, 38ff. and text figures 1–22; 109ff. and figs. 26–114; cf. also his articles cited *supra*, note 2, and A. Grabar, in *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 16 (1966), 10, 15f. The complicated design of the framework of the Ark mosaic, with two ornamented rectangles projecting from each of the four corners of the panel, seems to involve a reminiscence of the "eight-ended" frames used for easel paintings in antiquity (cf. W. Ehlich, *Bild und Rahmen im Altertum* [Leipzig, 1954], 80ff. and illustrations pp. 77, 82, 85, 239f., 242, 255). The same idea seems to have played a part in the design of the frame of the Agros and Opora mosaic at Antioch (D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* [Princeton, London, and The Hague, 1947], pl. 42a). The plan drawing, Budde, 37 (=our fig. A), is misleading in suggesting that there was east of the Ark mosaic with its frame a single elongated panel, similarly framed, which extended through the rest of the nave. The description (pp. 39, 45ff.) and the illustrations (figs. 58, 108, 109) indicate that the Ark mosaic was followed by another square panel of the same size, which, however, was subdivided by ornamental bands.

<sup>16</sup> Budde, 57ff. with text figures 26–33; 187 and figs. 132–42.

<sup>17</sup> Budde, 56f. and text figures 24, 25; 175 and figs. 115–31. For the orientation of the trees, plants, and birds, see 175 and figs. 116 and 124.

cations a number of scholars, including myself, had attributed them to the fifth century.<sup>18</sup> Budde had specified the period of Theodore, Mopsuestia's best known churchman, which would mean a date early in the fifth century or even at the end of the fourth.<sup>19</sup> In his book he moves the date back into the third quarter of the fourth century.<sup>20</sup> Obviously the problem needs to be settled. But the Samson cycle can be discussed fruitfully without dating it precisely even within a century.

The destruction of a great part of the Samson mosaic, which was roughly 23 m. in length and about 3.5 m. in width, is a calamity. The plan (fig. A) shows approximately what was left of the pavement when it was uncovered, though it omits one large piece in the middle that was extant.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, the plan only indicates the inscriptions which accompanied the scenes and hardly anything of the figures. On the basis of the plan and the available photographs Mary Katherine Donaldson, my very able assistant, has prepared a set of drawings on which the remnants of figures and other motifs are indicated in outline (fig. B). In publishing this set, which was meant initially as an aid for me in visualizing the composition and reconstructing the missing parts, I must make it clear, also on Dr. Donaldson's behalf, that her drawings can only be a rough approximation. The material which she had to work with was not sufficient to achieve precision. In particular, the scale of figures and the exact relative position of fragments are sometimes in doubt.

The story unfolded from right to left in a consecutive series of episodes taken from chapters 14, 15, and 16 of the Book of Judges. The scenes were not divided by any frames. The elaborate inscriptions which went with them and most of which were placed near the upper border cited or paraphrased appropriate passages from the Septuagint text. There were, so I believe, eleven episodes in all (not nine, as Budde thought); and most of them can be identified with certainty on the basis of what remained of the representations or the inscriptions or both. I shall enumerate the scenes briefly, indicating where my interpretation of the fragments diverges from Budde's.

The first identifiable scene at the east end—and presumably the first scene altogether—showed the young Samson killing the lion (chap. 14:5–6; fig. B, I and fig. 3). Only part of the back of his figure and two letters of the inscription remained.<sup>22</sup> Immediately to the left, and separated by a tree, followed Samson's

<sup>18</sup> I. Lavin, in *DOP*, 17 (1963), 273 note 424; E. Kitzinger, in *La mosaïque gréco-romaine*, Colloque international du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris, 1963 (Paris, 1965), 345; Grabar, in *CA*, 16 (1966), 10 ("fifth century (?) or slightly earlier"); J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, The Pelican History of Art (1970), 28. In a review of Budde's book, published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 23 June 1970, B. Brenk proposed a date as late as the sixth century.

<sup>19</sup> *RACr*, 32, pp. 54, 56; *Pantheon* (1960), 116, cf. also 123ff.

<sup>20</sup> Budde, 34. It should be noted that the author relies heavily on stylistic comparisons with mosaics at Antioch many of which are not securely dated (76ff.).

<sup>21</sup> A comparison of Budde, figs. 148 and 149, with his plan, p. 37, makes the omission evident. Cf. our figs. A and B, VII–VIII.

<sup>22</sup> Budde, fig. 144 and p. 77, no. 7 (right). If the socket for a parapet visible on figs. 139 and 143 (but not mentioned in the text) was in situ there would hardly have been any room for another scene to the east. Cf. our fig. 2.

return to the lion's carcass and his discovery of honey in its mouth (fig. B, II and fig. 3). The scene can be identified through the remaining fragment of its inscription, which quoted from chap. 14:9.<sup>23</sup> Next came the episode of the foxes (fig. B, III) with a long inscription based on chap. 15:4–5.<sup>24</sup> Nothing remained of the inscription of the following scene (fig. B, IV); but there was a fragment of a prostrate figure near the lower border with head down and eyes closed, which indicates that the scene depicted the slaying of the Philistines. Presumably, this was not the encounter mentioned in chap. 15:8, as Budde suggests, but the more famous episode at Lehi where Samson killed a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass (chap. 15:15).<sup>25</sup> Of the next scene (fig. B, V and fig. 4) only a part of the inscription remained.<sup>26</sup> It must have depicted an event preceding those related in chap. 16:1–3, to which Scenes VI and VII were devoted.<sup>27</sup> A clue is given by the word ἐνπεσ[οῦμαι] in the fourth line, evidently part of a citation from Samson's prayer in chap. 15:18, in which he cries out to the Lord in his thirst.<sup>28</sup> The scene must have represented Samson drinking the water which the Lord provided from the jawbone.<sup>29</sup> The long inscription of the following scene (fig. B, VI) was exceptionally placed near the lower border of the mosaic. It paraphrased parts of chap. 16:1–3; and the remains of a recumbent figure (or figures) immediately above indicate that Samson's visit to the harlot at Gaza was represented.<sup>30</sup> At the top was an architectural background (fig. 4),<sup>31</sup> which provided a foil also for the immediately adjoining representation of Samson carrying away the city gate (chap. 16:3). The legs and lower edge of the tunic of the hero's giant figure were preserved,<sup>32</sup> and there was room for a short inscription on top (fig. B, VII). The remains, immediately to the left, of the lower part of a figure in a very long garment, striding to the left (as did Samson), were interpreted by Budde as having belonged to a Philistine noble who hurried from the scene.<sup>33</sup> Such a figure is not, however, mentioned in the biblical text; nor does it appear in

<sup>23</sup> Budde, fig. 144 and p. 77, no. 7 (left).

<sup>24</sup> Budde, figs. 145, 147, and p. 77, no. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Budde, figs. 145, 146; for his interpretation, see p. 69f. He mentions traces of Samson's raised hand in a fragment of mosaic near the top. The fragment is only dimly visible on fig. 145, and the hand has not been indicated on our fig. B.

<sup>26</sup> Budde, fig. 150 and p. 77, no. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Budde (p. 70) considers this inscription as part of the paraphrase of chap. 16, vv. 1–3, which were illustrated below and to the left in Scenes VI and VII. But the inscription clearly does not form a single unit with the lengthy one of Scene VI.

<sup>28</sup> This reading was suggested to me by P. Bonifatius Fischer of the Vetus Latina Institut at Beuron, who was kind enough to give me his advice on some of the problems relating to the inscriptions. He assured me that  $\nu$  instead of  $\mu$  before  $\pi$  posed no difficulty in a text of this period.

<sup>29</sup> Cf., e.g., the representation in Paris, Bibl. Nat., gr. 510, fol. 347 $\nu$  (H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale* [Paris, 1929], pl. 49). The scene is represented also in some of the Byzantine Octateuchs (Vat. gr. 746, fol. 493r; Vatopedi 602, fol. 441 $\nu$ ). I am grateful to Kurt Weitzmann for letting me consult the corpus of photographs of Greek Octateuch miniatures in the Department of Art and Archaeology of Princeton University.

<sup>30</sup> Budde, figs. 148, 151; a fragment of the left end of the inscription may be seen on fig. 149; cf. p. 77, no. 8. The last part of the inscription ("he knew that on his account they were watching the gates") adds an element not contained in the biblical text.

<sup>31</sup> Budde, fig. 150.

<sup>32</sup> Budde, fig. 149.

<sup>33</sup> Budde, fig. 149 and p. 71.

other renderings of the event, common though this scene is in Byzantine and mediaeval art. In biblical representations of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, persons wearing garments so long as to conceal part of the feet are normally female.<sup>34</sup> And there can be no doubt that, although its left foot appeared to be resting on the piece of ground that supported Samson of Scene VII, the figure actually belonged to the next scene (fig. B, VIII). There is a large empty area to be accounted for before we reach Scene IX, and the episode to which the female figure belonged must have been chosen from among those related in the intervening verses (chap. 16:4–14). It could have been either the bribing of Delilah by the Philistines or one of the three successive demonstrations of Samson's strength. All these scenes call for the presence of Delilah; and it was to a representation of her that the remaining fragment belonged. Probably the scene depicted was one of the three demonstrations of strength rather than the less dramatic and less space-filling bribery episode.<sup>35</sup> Scene IX (fig. B) showed Samson asleep on a couch with a Philistine standing over him and the scissors being applied to his hair (presumably by Delilah herself, who must have appeared to the left). What remained of the lengthy inscription overhead related to chap. 16:15–17.<sup>36</sup> The inscription of the next scene (fig. B, X and fig. 5),<sup>37</sup> which quoted verbatim from chap. 16:21 and whose overall length can thus be restored with confidence, must have adjoined immediately to the left. It probably was separated from the inscription of Scene IX only by a column of conventionalized "leaves" such as those which separated it from the inscription of Scene XI on its left. The representation in Scene X must have been the blinding of Samson; and presumably a fragment of drapery perpendicularly below the inscription belonged to his figure.<sup>38</sup> The rest of the floor area as far as the western border was occupied by a single scene (fig. B, XI and fig. 5) depicting the final catastrophe (chap. 16:23ff.). Overhead was a very long inscription of at least six lines which included passages from verses 23–28.<sup>39</sup> There remained part of the figure of Samson being led by a boy, as described in verse 26, while to the left pieces

<sup>34</sup> Cf., e.g., H. Karpp, *Die frühchristlichen und mittelalterlichen Mosaiken in Santa Maria Maggiore zu Rom* (Baden-Baden, 1964), figs. 6, 7, 13, 14, 25, 37, 39, 42, 49, 51, 56, 61, 63, etc.; F. W. Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna* (Wiesbaden, 1958), figs. 196, 206, and 326; A. Grabar, *Les peintures de l'Évangéliste de Sinope* (Paris, 1948), pl. 1 (Salome; note the two ornamental patches at ankle height comparable to those of our mosaic figure). For a representation of Delilah in a very long dress with two ornamental patches, see Paris, Bibl. Nat., gr. 510, fol. 347v (Omont, *op. cit.*, pl. 49).

<sup>35</sup> Two of these demonstrations of strength were illustrated in the Vatican Octateuch MS, gr. 747, fol. 250 recto and verso (cf. K. Weitzmann, in *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 7, 2 [1948], p. 5ff. and fig. 2). For the bribing one must distinguish between the offer of money (verse 5) and the handing over of the money (verse 18). The latter event, which is illustrated in two other Octateuch manuscripts (Vat. gr. 746, fol. 494v; Vatopedi 602, fol. 443v), can hardly have been depicted in Scene VIII since it is related in the text *after* the verses paraphrased in the inscription of Scene IX.

<sup>36</sup> Budde, figs. 152, 153, and p. 77, no. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Budde, fig. 154 and p. 77, no. 3 (right half).

<sup>38</sup> Budde, fig. 154. For Budde's different interpretation of this fragment, see *infra*, note 40.

<sup>39</sup> Budde, fig. 154 and p. 77, nos. 1, 2, and 3 (left half). Budde (p. 74f.) assumes a division between his inscriptions "2" and "3" and accordingly reconstructs two separate scenes. But the top lines of the two inscriptions form a single sentence paraphrasing only slightly the first part of verse 23. Clearly, therefore, the inscription began at the left corner ("1") and continued without interruption to the separation signs dividing it from the inscription of Scene X.



from the house of the Philistines, already in a state of collapse, were shown as they "fell upon the lords and upon all the people that were therein" (verse 30).<sup>40</sup>

This cycle of the Life of Samson takes its place alongside the paintings of the Dura Synagogue, the El Bagawat necropolis, and the Cotton and Vienna Genesis manuscripts as one of the very few early remnants of biblical picture cycles from the Greek East. One obvious question is what new light it can throw on the early history of biblical iconography. If the mosaic should turn out to have belonged to a synagogue, its bearing on this question is particularly great. But regardless of whether its context was Jewish or Christian, it needs to be carefully scrutinized for any evidence it might provide of Jewish antecedents for Christian Old Testament iconography; and, particularly, for any traces of Jewish apocryphal traditions such as have been found in a number of Early Christian and Byzantine biblical picture cycles.<sup>41</sup> Another and related question concerns the affinities of our mosaic with other known renderings of the Samson story. It would be especially interesting if our cycle could be shown to have a specific connection with that of the Byzantine Octateuch manuscripts, for these manuscripts have been thought to be based on an early archetype that originated in Antioch.<sup>42</sup> Since Mopsuestia was within Antioch's immediate sphere of influence, our mosaic may provide a means of testing this theory.

These are tasks for the future. I wish to devote the rest of this paper to another aspect of the mosaic that seems to me extremely important, namely, its general format and the relation of that format to book illumination and the illustrated rotulus in particular. In terms of floor decoration it is, after all, not the most natural thing in the world to depict eleven distinct episodes from a biblical book in a single strip without any kind of partition or interior framework such as the mosaicist's repertoire could so easily have provided. There is, of course, one outstanding example of such continuous narrative, namely the tenth-century parchment roll in the Vatican Library depicting the story of Joshua (fig. 6).<sup>43</sup> Allowing for the difference of the medium, the two picture sequences are indeed closely comparable so far as their composition is concerned.

<sup>40</sup> Budde, figs. 154–57; cf. our fig. 5. Budde (p. 74) describes Samson as being seated. Apparently he takes the piece of drapery at the right edge of the fragmentary mosaic area as part of this figure, but this is implausible for a number of reasons. The motif of the boy leading the blinded hero calls for the latter to be on his feet; the placing of the two circular ornaments on the drapery suggests that the garment did not continue to the right beyond the triangular hiatus, nor would the configuration of folds to the left of that hiatus make sense in relation to a single bent knee; and, if the drapery fragment to the right of the hiatus were part of a giant seated figure, not enough room would be left for Scene X showing Samson being blinded. The fragment of drapery on the right must belong to the figure of Samson in this latter scene, which evidently was crowded together very closely with Scenes IX and XI.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. K. Weitzmann, "The Question of the Influence of Jewish Pictorial Sources on Old Testament Illustration" (translation of an article in German in *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser* = *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband I [1964], 401 ff.), published in K. Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, H. Kessler ed. (Chicago and London, 1971), 76 ff. (with further references).

<sup>42</sup> K. Weitzmann, "The Illustration of the Septuagint" (translation of an article in German in *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, N. S., 3/4 [1952–53], 96 ff.), published in Weitzmann, *Studies*, 45 ff.; see esp. 53 f.; also *idem*, in *DOP*, 18 (1964), 350.

<sup>43</sup> K. Weitzmann, *The Joshua Roll* (Princeton, 1948).

To be sure, the miniaturist, working with more pliable material and for a reading distance only, was able to include a good deal more secondary detail — bystanders, landscape features, and the like—than our floor mosaic, even in its complete state, is likely to have shown. But the mosaic, too, had background scenery, witness the city view which served as a backdrop to the events at Gaza (fig. 4). What is similar above all is the way in which, the continuity of the narrative notwithstanding, episodes are set off one from the other as distinct units. This is particularly clear at the right end of the mosaic, where, as a number of times in the Joshua Roll, a tree plays the part of both a partition and a filler (fig. B, II and fig. 3). And, as in the Joshua Roll, each episode is accompanied by an excerpt from the biblical text (in our case normally a paraphrase) which often forms a block of several lines extending over much or all of the length of the scene.<sup>44</sup> Only, in the mosaic most of these blocks of texts are at the top, whereas in the Vatican Roll they are at the bottom. However, on the mosaic, too, at least one inscription—that of Scene VI—was placed at the bottom.

A thesis widely accepted today holds that the Joshua Roll is a new creation of the tenth century, a sort of antiquarian oddity of the period of the Macedonian Renaissance, imitating the relief bands of Trajan's Column and the other late Roman triumphal columns and substituting the story of a biblical hero for that of the triumphant Emperor.<sup>45</sup> Traditionally—so this thesis holds—the book in roll form, particularly the papyrus roll of Hellenistic and Roman times, was not illustrated with continuous picture bands, but only with small vignettes inserted in the text column at the appropriate place and limited to the key figures of an episode, which were shown without background or setting.<sup>46</sup> The picture band in the Joshua Roll is thought to have been put together in the tenth century from such units originally designed for the text columns of a papyrus roll and then transferred onto the pages of parchment codices, where they had gradually been enriched with secondary features. The very fact that the Joshua cycle is only superficially continuous and really consists of separate units corresponding to the individual episodes is cited in support of this theory.<sup>47</sup> Now the Mopsuestia mosaic seems to me to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that, whatever the earlier history of this type of illustration, picture rolls similar to the Joshua Roll did exist in late antiquity. That biblical texts were illustrated by means of vignettes inserted in the columns of script is entirely possible. But granted even that this was a common form of text illustration, it is difficult to see why this should exclude the existence also of picture rotuli telling a story by visual means, with scenes strung together to express the flow of the narrative and with only relatively short explanatory texts.<sup>48</sup> The Samson mosaic in my opinion shows that such rolls did exist, at

<sup>44</sup> On the relation of texts and pictures in the Joshua Roll, see *ibid.*, 43ff., 52.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 100ff.

<sup>46</sup> K. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1970), *passim.*, esp. 47ff., 239ff.

<sup>47</sup> Weitzmann, *Joshua Roll*, 51ff.

<sup>48</sup> Weitzmann does not entirely exclude the possibility that such rotuli may have been made in ancient times "for a special purpose"; see *Roll and Codex*, 129, 230.

any rate by the fourth or fifth century; and that consequently the Joshua Roll may well be based on a model in scroll form harking back to that period.

I would not go so far as to claim that in our mosaic a picture rotulus is reproduced with mechanical accuracy. Certainly, it makes good sense to assume that, just as the Vatican Roll extols the deeds of Joshua, so there was also a parchment scroll dedicated to the exploits of Samson. But I do not think the Mopsuestia mosaic can be a literal copy of such a "Samson Rotulus." One obvious point militating against this assumption is the fact that the story proceeds from right to left (though the action in a number of individual scenes moves from left to right). Our mosaicist followed a normal rule in the decoration of basilicas whereby picture cycles begin at the point nearest the sanctuary.<sup>49</sup> Another point is an apparent unevenness of spacing. Although the fragmentary condition of our floor makes it advisable to exercise caution on this score, it does seem that the artist allowed himself relatively much space at the sanctuary end and then found himself cramped as the work proceeded toward the west. Scenes in that area apparently were more tightly packed, and more of the story had to be left to inscriptions, which thus became longer and also had to be more closely spaced. Had the mosaicist had before him an actual model in rotulus form, he perhaps could have calculated more easily the spaces he needed and could have avoided such imbalances. But even if it was the mosaicist himself who put the episodes together, there can be no doubt that he was inspired by the picture roll format and, in fact, wished to convey the impression of a gigantic rotulus spread out on the floor. What to my mind makes this indisputable is the character and extent of the inscriptions. Such lengthy texts—going well beyond simple captions and following closely the wording of the Septuagint—can only be meant to suggest a manuscript and presuppose knowledge of such manuscripts both on the artist's and the beholder's part. In general, monumental picture cycles of late antiquity lean rather excessively toward reticence. One need only think of the frescoes of the Dura Synagogue, or the Via Latina catacomb, or the mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, three extensive ensembles of Old Testament scenes with few or no explanatory labels. The length of our inscriptions—and, given their location, they can hardly be considered very practical as a didactic tool—is all the more striking. They can only be meant to convey the idea of a "Samson Rotulus" blown up to huge dimensions and make it necessary to assume that picture rolls of this kind existed.<sup>50</sup>

I said at the beginning that the Mopsuestia mosaics open up unusually wide and varied perspectives leading into different branches of research. Evidently, the early history of book illumination is one of them. Another (which I have not touched upon at all and which, in any case, I would not be competent to

<sup>49</sup> Cf., e.g., the Old Testament scenes in S. Maria Maggiore in Rome (Karpp, *op. cit.*, 13f.); or the Christological scenes in S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna: Geschichte und Monumente* [Wiesbaden, 1969], 189).

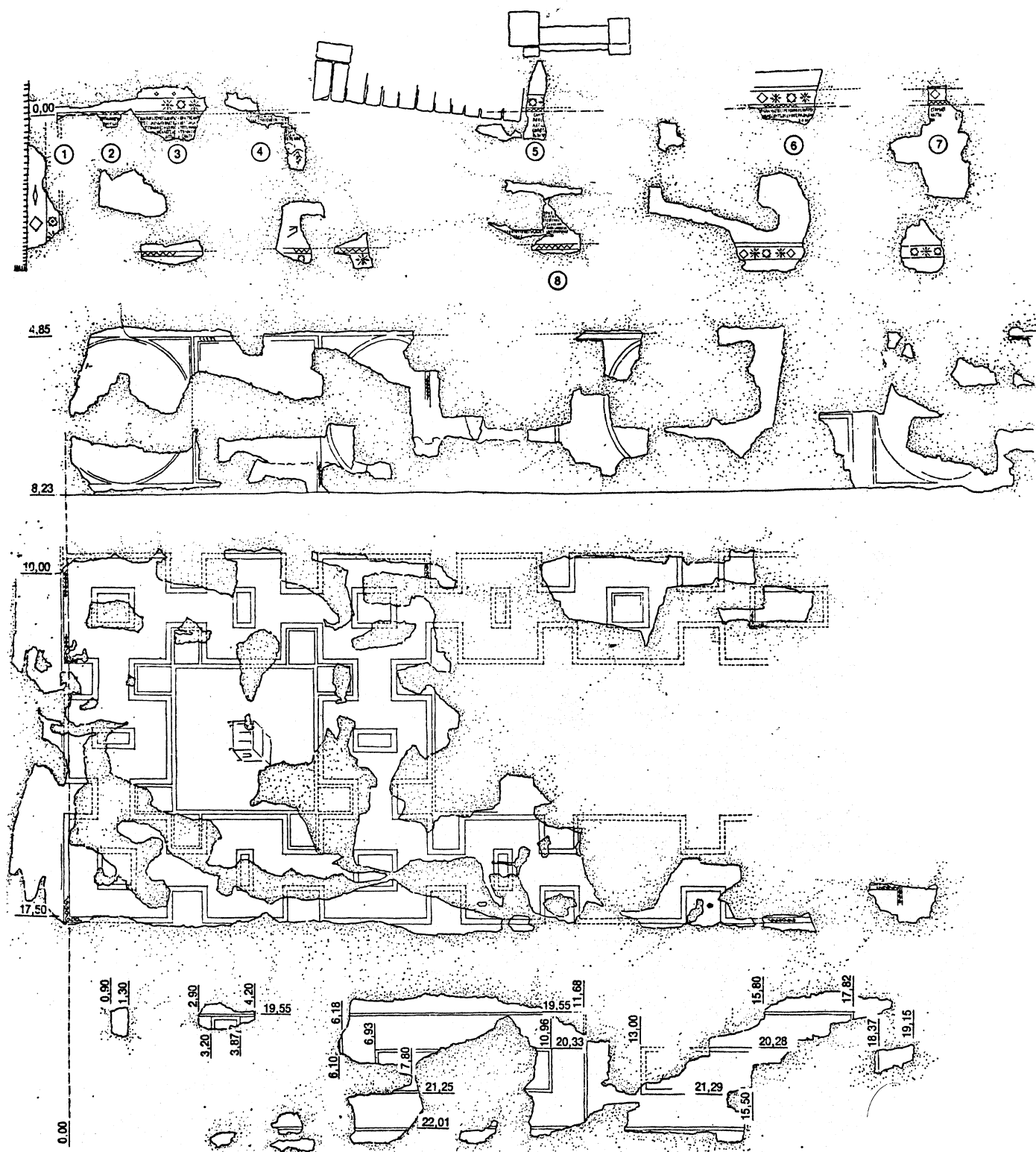
<sup>50</sup> The Mopsuestia Samson mosaic also provides evidence against R. Bianchi Bandinelli's contention that prior to the second half of the sixth century there were in the Greek East no mosaics derived from miniatures (*Hellenistic-Byzantine Miniatures of the Iliad* [Olten, 1955], 32).

discuss) is textual criticism. Already it appears that Old Testament scholars may be able to extract from our inscriptions useful information concerning the history of the Septuagint text.<sup>51</sup> All in all, if ever a floor mosaic called for a cooperative effort, it is this.<sup>52</sup>

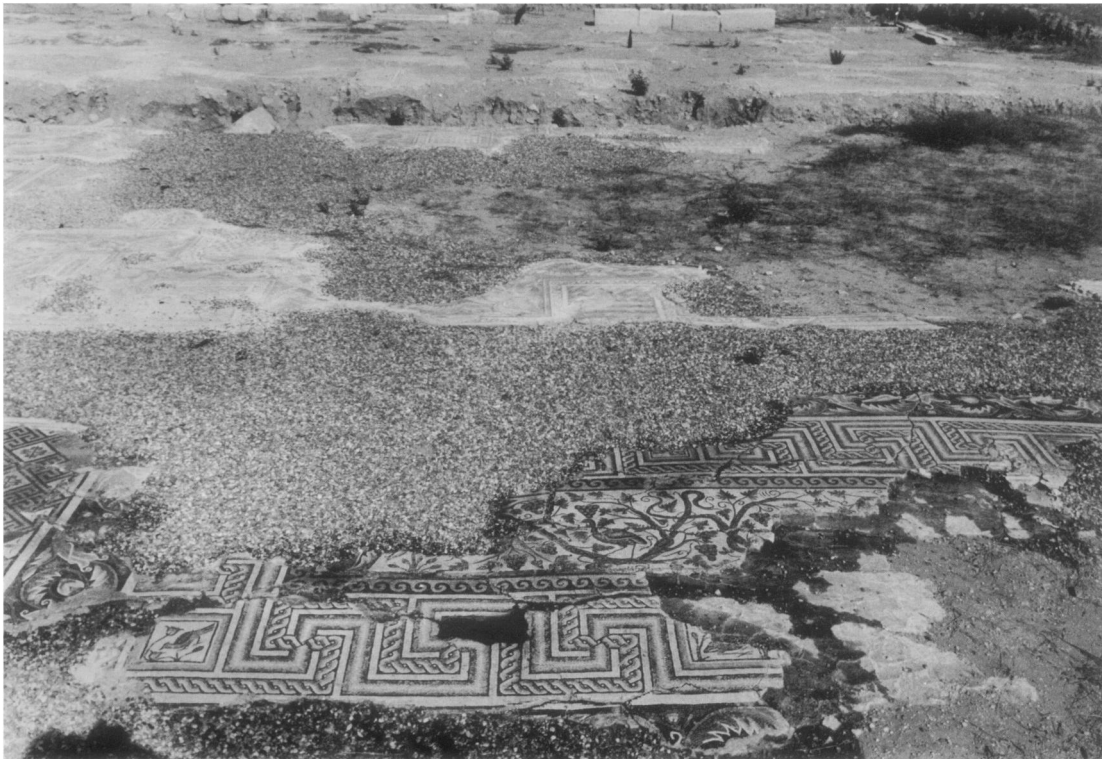
<sup>51</sup> The wording of our mosaic inscriptions agrees with the "B" Text (Codex Vaticanus) in A. Rahlfs' edition of the Septuagint more often than with the "A" Text (Codex Alexandrinus), but there is no consistency in this respect. As P. Bonifatius Fischer has pointed out to me, the history of the Greek text of the Book of Judges is particularly complicated.

<sup>52</sup> I wish to record my gratitude to Dr. Mary K. Donaldson, who not only constructed the drawing reproduced in fig. B but rendered most valuable help in all phases of my work on this paper. My thanks are due also to Professor L. Budde, Münster, for kindly providing me with the photographs reproduced in figs. 1-5 and to the Verlag Aurel Bongers, Recklinghausen, for permission to reproduce these photographs as well as the plan of the Mopsuestia mosaics (fig. A).

This paper was ready to go to press when Helmut Buschhausen's article on the Noah mosaic at Mopsuestia appeared ("Die Deutung des Archemosaiks in der Justinianischen Kirche von Mopsuestia," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 21 [1972], 57 ff.). The author, who announces an extensive study of the Samson mosaic, considers but rejects the possibility that the Mopsuestia basilica was a synagogue and proposes a date in the Justinianic period.



A. Misis (Mopsuestia), Basilica. Plan (after Budde)



1. View from South



2. Samson Mosaic seen from East  
Misis (Mopsuestia), Basilica

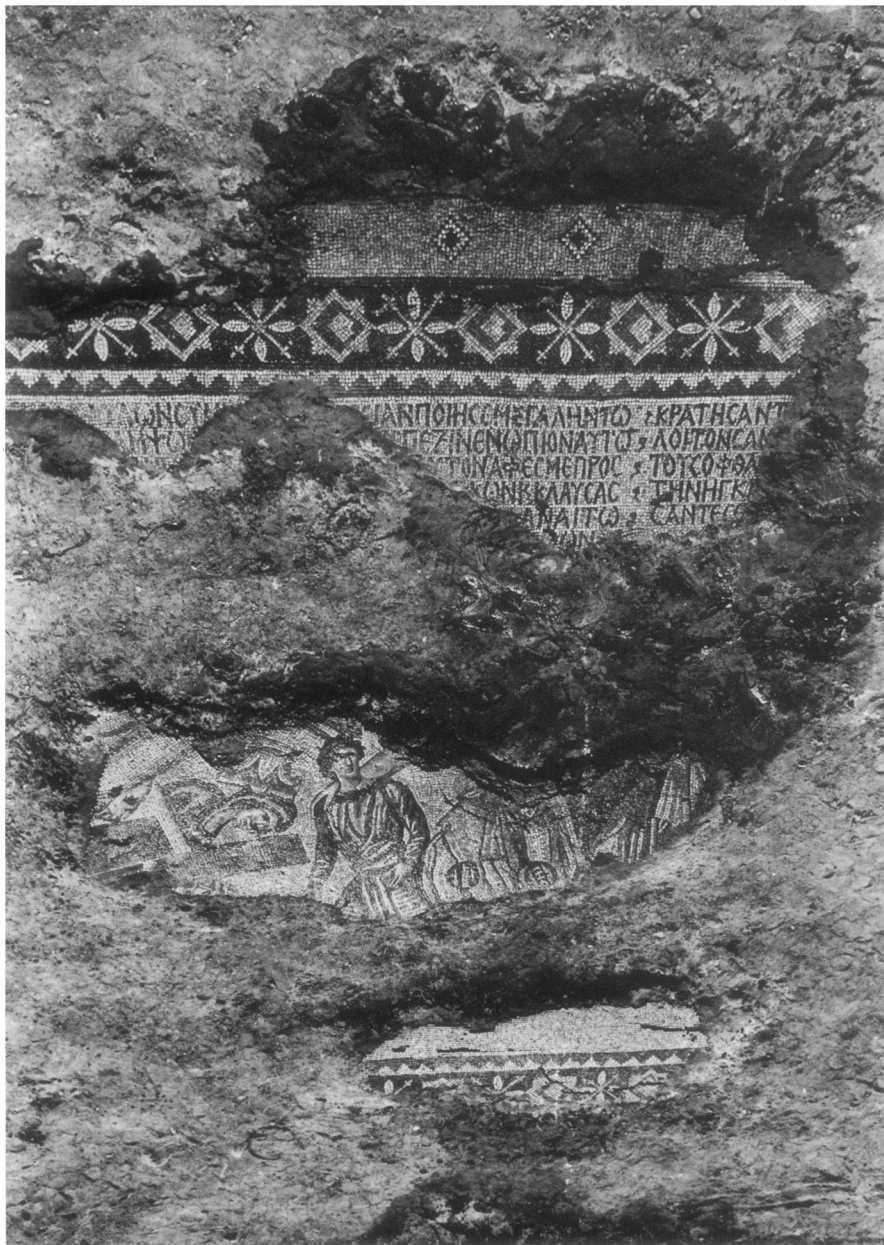


3. Fragments showing Parts of Scenes I and II



4. Fragments showing Parts of Scenes V–VII  
Samson Mosaic



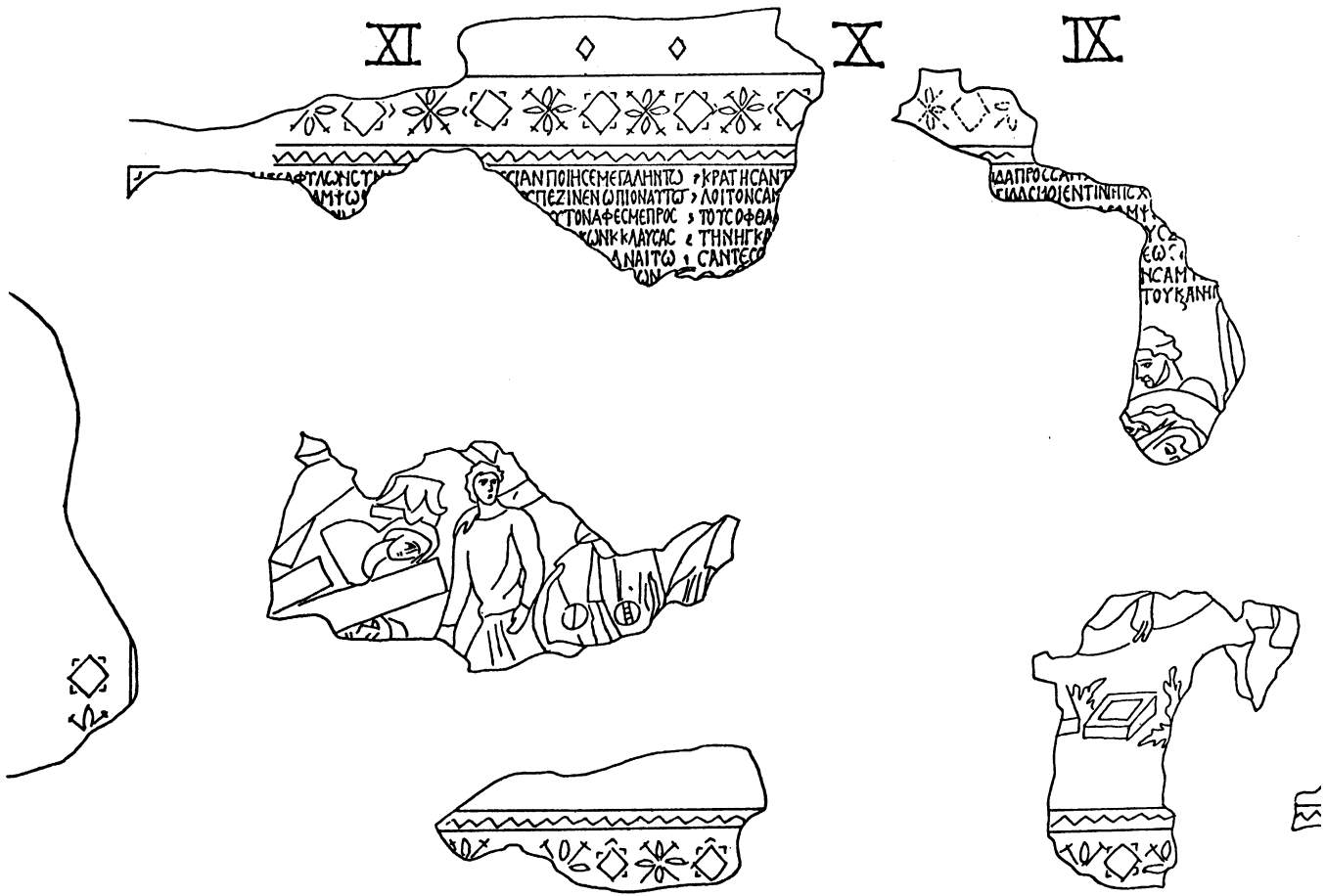


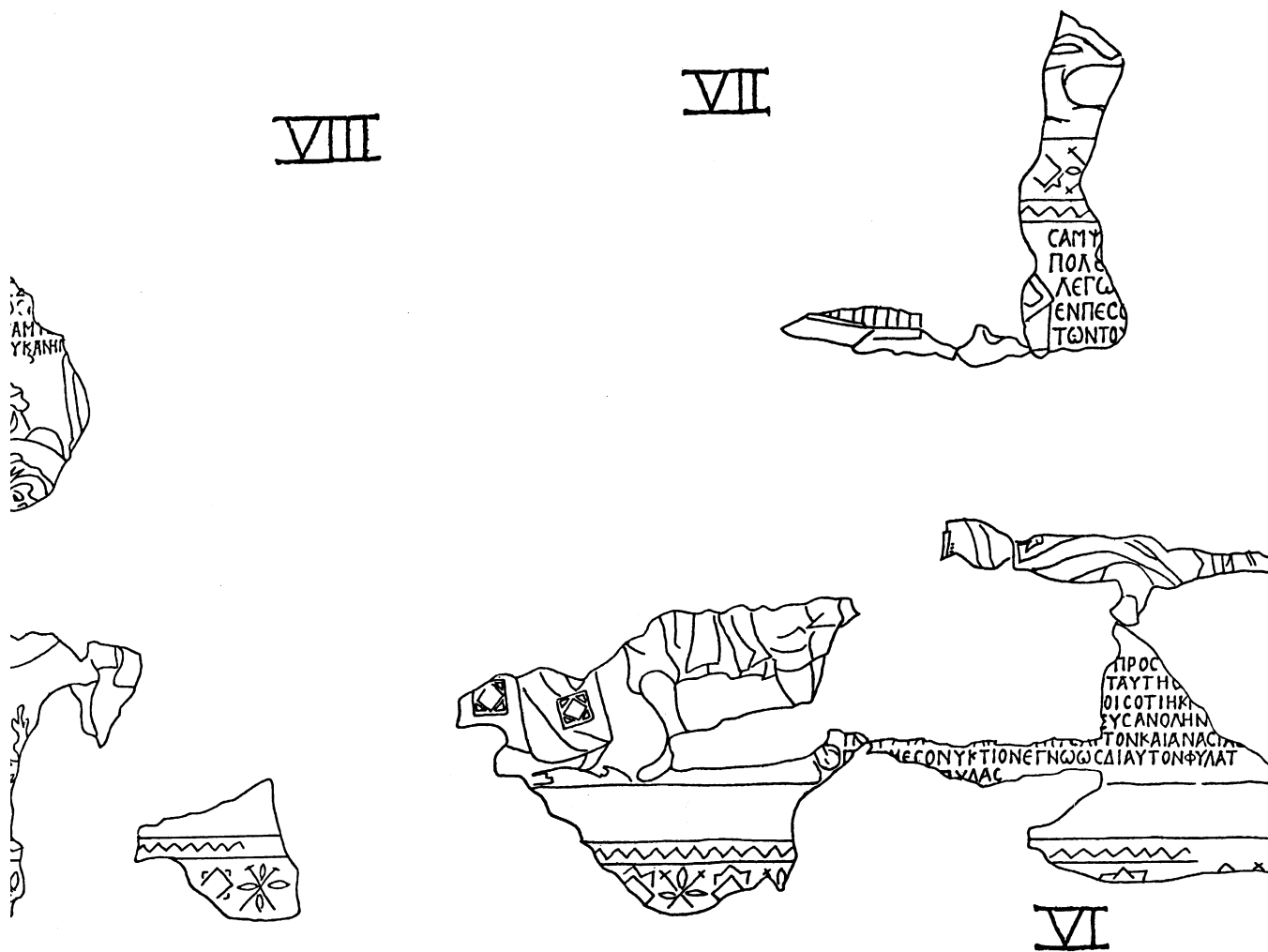
5. Samson Mosaic. Fragments showing Parts of Scenes X and XI



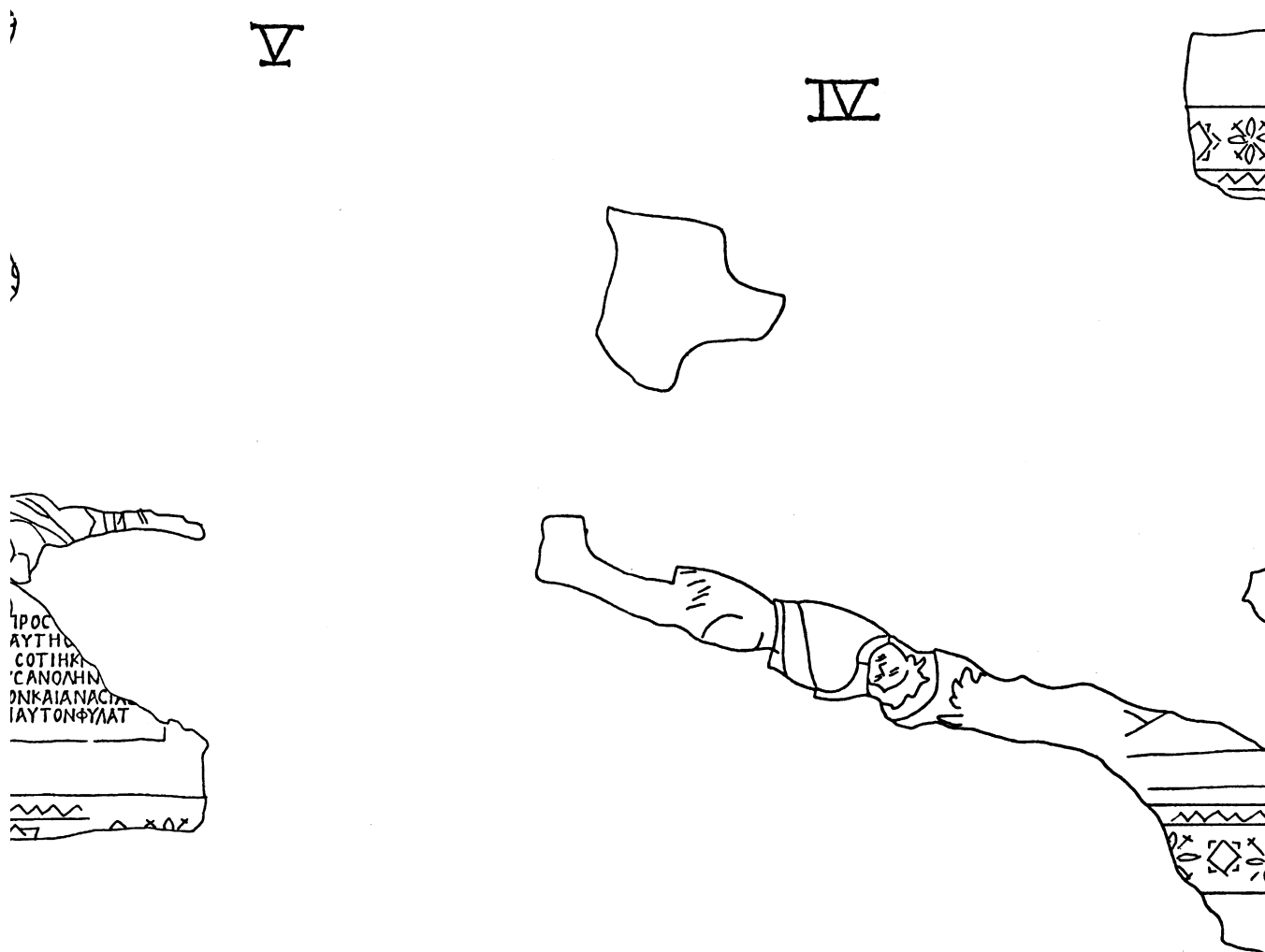
6. Vatican Library, MS Pal. Gr. 431 (Joshua Roll), Sheet VI: Joshua Sending Spies to Jericho



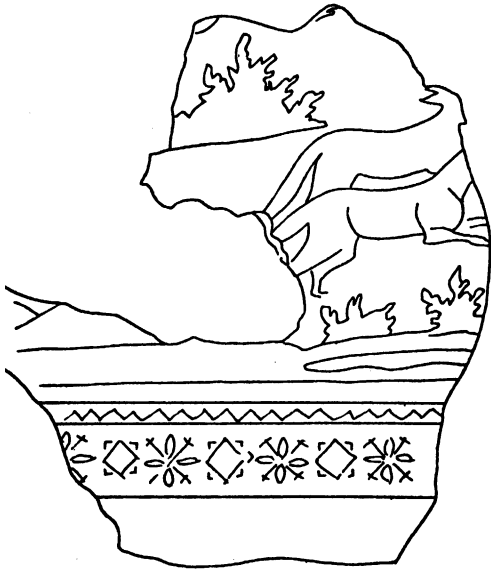
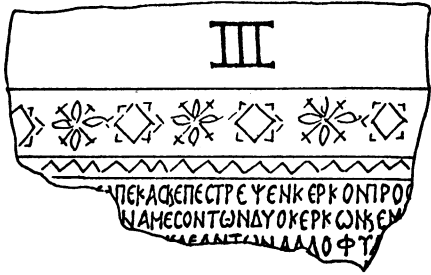




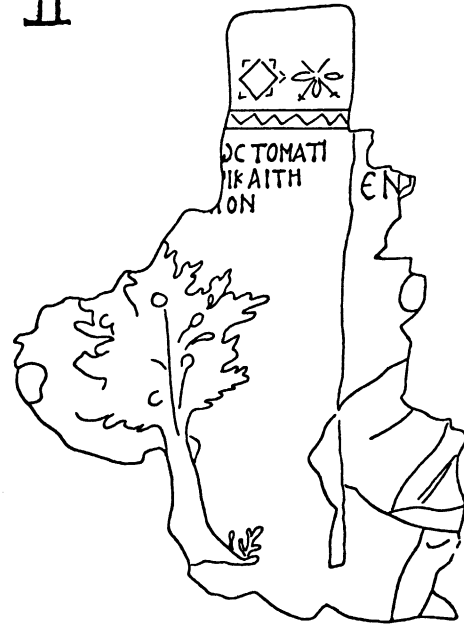
estia), Basilica, Samson Mosaic. Recon



Mosaic. Reconstruction of Remains (M. 111)



II



I

